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EPA probes charges company is illegally polluting Duwamish

by Peyton Whitely
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The Environmental Protection Agency is investigating accusations that another Seattle company has illegally dumped industrial waste in the Duwamish River.

The target this time is the Pioneer Construction Materials Co., 5975 E. Marginal Way S., a subsidiary of Portland's Riedel International Inc.

Since last year, the EPA and the U.S. attorney's office in Seattle have begun more than two dozen criminal investigations of anti-pollution laws, with several of them resulting in convictions and substantial penalties.

The Pioneer investigation began in May, when the EPA learned that Pioneer trucks are washed down near the river, and the company has no required permits to allow it to discharge waste into the river.

In a search-warrant affidavit filed yesterday, the EPA said it met with a Pioneer plant manager in May and discussed the discharges. Pioneer said the concrete residue wasn't routinely sent into the river and no permits were needed.

But as late as Aug. 27, the EPA said it discovered otherwise: A hidden pipe leads from the wash area, with a "loose-fitting cover plate" apparently placed to hide the discharges.

Gerd Hattwig, an EPA special agent, said he's seen "a steady stream of concrete waste waters" coming from the pipe. And when EPA analyzed the runoff, it found the samples were so alkaline that they would burn human skin and kill aquatic life.

The EPA got court permission to seize records at Pioneer, did so Wednesday night, and now is reviewing the material.

A Riedel executive in Portland said last night the company had no comment on the search. Riedel has a subsidiary that specializes in doing environmental cleanup work.

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